



U.S. ARMY COMBAT READINESS/SAFETY CENTER

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Stay smart on beach safety

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A trip to the beach is a summer ritual for millions of Americans, including Soldiers, their Families and Army civilians.

While beach outings offer something for people of all ages, they bring safety risks that can change fun in the sun into something else. Thinking about beach safety, rip currents, weather planning and condition flags can make a beach trip memorable for all the right reasons.

Two Soldiers drowned in off-duty accidents during fiscal 2012. One fell into the water from a hotel boardwalk and could not be resuscitated; another Soldier was swimming with his two children when they were carried from the shore in a rip current. A bystander rescued the children, but the Soldier was pulled out to sea and disappeared.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 10 people die from unintentional drowning every day in the United States. Of these, two are children aged 14 or younger. Drowning ranks fifth among the leading causes of unintentional injury and death in the United States, claiming 3,533 lives from 2005-2009.

At the beach

Whether it's uneven terrain, rip currents or unexpected hazardous weather, swimmers in natural water settings must be aware of hazards and take special precautions to stay safe. Swimming lessons can help protect young children from drowning; however, constant, careful supervision is necessary when children are in or around the water.

"Summer fun comes with new dangers and risks," said Janet Frolescher, president and CEO of the National Safety Council. "If you have to be out in the sun, use sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher, reapply after swimming or perspiring and try to find shaded areas. Always supervise children when playing near and in the water, and never drink alcohol while participating in water activities."

Rip currents

Rip currents can occur along any shoreline with breaking waves, but are prevalent along most U.S. coastlines. They pull swimmers away from shore into deeper water at speeds of up to 8 feet per second and are dangerous to all swimmers, even those with strong skills.

A key to avoiding rip currents is knowing what they look like.

“The signs of a rip current are very subtle and difficult for the average beachgoer to identify,” said Richard Scott, safety and occupational health specialist, Ground Directorate, U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center. “Swimmers should look for differences in the water’s color and motion, incoming wave shape, and breaking point compared to adjacent conditions.

“Look for a channel of churning, choppy water, a line of foam, seaweed or debris moving steadily seaward, or a break in the incoming wave pattern.”

Eyes on the sky

Weather information is available to anyone with a weather radio or access to the Internet. Because it’s easy to determine what you’ll find at the beach and the route you’ll take to get there, you shouldn’t be surprised.

Even if it’s sunny when you hit the beach, be aware conditions can quickly turn ugly with thunderstorms, lightning and strong winds. If you see stormy weather developing, seek shelter and stay in touch with weather warnings.

Know your flags

Flags are the traditional means for providing information to beach and water users. When used properly, they can be an effective element of a comprehensive safety system.

Beachgoers can look for signs, brochures or placards to determine the meaning of various flags. Information is often fixed to the flagpole or indicated on an information board at entrances to the shore.

For additional information on water safety, visit <https://safety.army.mil>.